

Manhood Initiation in Ozuzu Clan, Rivers State: A Semiotic Analysis of Traditional Songs

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This study examines the communicative roles and cultural significance of traditional songs performed during the initiation into manhood among the Ozuzu clan in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. Anchored on qualitative ethnographic design, the research draws on data collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and visual clips of ritual songs, via social media. The study employs thematic and semiotic analysis to uncover the symbolic meanings and communicative strategies embedded in the performances. Findings reveal that initiation songs serve not merely as ritual accompaniment but as powerful tools for moral instruction, identity formation, and intergenerational knowledge transmission. Through the use of repetition, and symbolic imagery, the songs encode values of courage, responsibility, endurance, and social cohesion. The songs also function as oral archives, preserving ancestral wisdom and reinforcing communal norms within a participatory framework characterized by repetitive call-and-response structures. Drawing on the Ethnography of Communication and Semiotic Theory, the study highlights how these oral texts constitute a critical cultural mechanism for male socialization and cultural preservation. The research contributes to the documentation of endangered oral traditions and fills a scholarly gap by focusing on the relatively undocumented Ozuzu clan's initiation practices. It recommends preservation of the initiation culture, effective preservation of artifacts and adequate media exposure for global visibility among others. The study reinforces the argument that traditional songs are vital communicative instruments for reinforcing and sustaining indigenous identity in a rapidly globalizing world.

Keywords: Initiation Songs, Ozuzu Clan, Oral Tradition, Manhood Initiation, Cultural Preservation

Introduction

Across many African societies, rites of passage serve as pivotal cultural milestones through which individuals are inducted into new social roles and responsibilities. Among such rites, the initiation into manhood is particularly significant, marking the symbolic transition from adolescence to adulthood. In the Ozuzu clan of Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria, this transition is richly embedded in oral performances, notably traditional songs, which carry deep communicative, educative, and symbolic meanings.

Songs in African cultures are not merely artistic expressions; they are vehicles for cultural transmission and socialization. As Finnegan (2012) affirms, "oral literature in Africa is not just for entertainment but an essential medium through which communities educate and preserve traditions. In the context of initiation rites, songs often encode messages about courage, discipline, loyalty, social roles, and community values, all of which are integral to becoming a man in traditional societies (Okpewho, 1992).

The communicative power of these songs lies not only in their lyrical content but also in their rhythmic patterns, performance style, and symbolic language, which together create a rich tapestry of meaning. Barber (1997) argues that African oral forms are "dense with layered meanings that are best understood through close attention to performance context and audience interpretation." In the Ozuzu clan, the songs used during initiation ceremonies are more than cultural artifacts; they are living texts that convey unwritten codes about masculinity and communal life.

Ozuzu, *Mba-Asa*, a prominent clan in Etche is made up of seven clans such as Isu, Ozuzu, Elele, Ogida, Owu, Ihie and Egbu, which are predominantly made up of farmers, palm wine tappers, palm oil producers and fishermen. Their immediate neighbours in Etche are Akpoku and Abara, they also neighbours to Omerelu in Ikwerre Local government Area.

Despite the richness of these oral traditions, there is a notable gap in scholarly documentation and analysis of the communicative roles of initiation songs in many Nigerian communities, including the Ozuzu clan, also known as *Mba-Asa*.

This study seeks to fill that gap by interrogating the semiotic, communicative, and cultural functions of traditional songs during Ozuzu's manhood initiation rites.

Statement of the Problem

Traditional initiation songs in African societies, particularly among the Ozuzu clan, have largely been preserved through oral transmission. However, modernization, religious influences, and cultural neglect threaten their continuity and obscure their meanings. While these songs continue to be used during initiation ceremonies, their communicative value, symbolism, and socio-cultural significance are often overlooked or misunderstood by younger generations. The continued neglect of the communicative significances of traditional songs in Africa, and particularly Ozuzu Clan in Etche land, is a threat to the history, culture and traditional heritage of the people.

According to Finnegan (2012) the place of oral literature such as traditional songs in educating, mobilising and preserving traditions in African communities cannot be over-emphasised. Finnegan's position underscores that failure to retain cultures and traditions threatens Africa's identity formation.

Also, in his study about manhood initiation in the Nama and Xhosa traditions in South Africa, Eze (2015) reported that adulthood initiation practices should be enlivened in African communities to preserve cultural songs, send moral messages and teach the initiates to realize their full potential as adults.

Finnegan and Eze's studies focused on African communities outside Nigeria, and were not about manhood initiation rites in Ozuzu Clan, Etche. The implication is that there is a dearth of research on the communicative significance of traditional songs in the area. The twin issues of negligence of traditional songs and the lack of research in the area are critical reasons that make this research effort most crucial.

Objectives of the Study

Generally, this study aimed to examine the communicative significances of manhood initiation songs in Ozuzu Clan, Etche, Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Examine the lyrical content and symbolic meaning of traditional initiation songs in Ozuzu clan.
2. Analyze the communicative roles that traditional songs play during initiation into manhood.
3. Explore how traditional manhood initiation songs reinforce cultural values, masculinity, and social responsibilities.
4. Assess the roles of traditional songs in preserving cultural values in contemporary times.

Research Questions

1. What are the dominant themes and messages encoded in the initiation songs of the Ozuzu clan?
2. How do these songs communicate cultural values and expectations of manhood?
3. In what ways do the songs facilitate the socialization process of the initiates?
4. How can understanding these songs contribute to cultural preservation and revitalization?

Operational Clarification of Keywords

Initiation songs: these are special and seasonal songs adopted mainly for the purpose of the Ozuzu clan's manhood initiation.

Ozuzu Clan: also known as *Mba Asa* - one of the six clans that made up the Etche ethnic nationality in Rivers State, Nigeria; with seven communities, namely: Isu, Ozuzu, Ogida, Orwu, Egbo, Ihie and Elele.

Oral Tradition: Ozuzu clan's culture, transmitted from generation to generation without a formal documentation.

Manhood Initiation: An annual ritual aimed at culturally inducting boys into manhood and grooming them as men.

The study ideologically dwelt on determining the communicative imports of traditional manhood initiation songs in Ozuzu Clan, popularly known as *Mba Asa*. Ozuzu Clan is located in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. This area is renowned for its vibrant cultural practices, particularly the male initiation rites. Its selection is based on the availability of participants directly involved in or knowledgeable about traditional initiation ceremonies and song performances.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by two complementary theories: Ethnography of Communication (Dell Hymes, 1974): This framework emphasizes the importance of understanding communication within its cultural context. It considers who is speaking, to

whom, in what context, and for what purpose. Applied to this study, it helps uncover how initiation songs are structured, performed, and interpreted within the *Mba-Asa* initiation setting.

Semiotic Theory (Roland Barthes, 1967): Semiotics enables the analysis of signs and symbols embedded in communication. Initiation songs are rich in metaphor, symbolism, and performative elements. Barthes' theory provides tools to decode the multiple layers of meaning within the songs, revealing their role in constructing social identities and moral expectations.

Literature Review

African traditional Songs: A Communicative Incursion

In African societies, traditional songs serve as powerful mediums of communication. They encode communal values, instruct on moral behavior, and reinforce group identity (Finnegan, 2012). These songs are typically structured around local idioms, proverbs, and symbolic language, allowing them to carry culturally resonant meanings. Akpabot (1986) notes that music in Nigeria is "inseparable from the rituals and ceremonies of life," emphasizing its role in rites of passage, especially in rural communities.

According to Okpewho (1992), oral traditions, songs in particular, serve as repositories of cultural knowledge and are integral to the transmission of unwritten societal rules. Initiation songs, therefore, do not merely entertain; they educate, instruct, and initiate.

Initiation into manhood, a practice rooted in the concept of rites of passage, as outlined by van Gennep (1960), encompasses three main stages: separation, transition, and incorporation. Within this framework, the initiation into manhood is a socially constructed process, whereby the initiate is taught the responsibilities, virtues, and expectations associated with adulthood. Turner (1969) further elaborates on the liminal stage, where the initiate is most receptive to symbolic instruction, including that provided through ritual songs. However, Eze (2021) agrees that the manner of the initiation practice may be different but the goals of the process are the same.

In contexts like the Ozuzu clan of Rivers State, initiation rites are structured with various symbolic elements, especially songs that communicate expectations of courage, responsibility, loyalty, and self-control. The songs play a critical role in guiding initiates through this liminal phase by embedding teachings about bravery, discipline, loyalty, and community service. Barber (1997) views these oral performances as "cultural scripts" that frame and reinforce communal ideologies.

The semiotic theory of Barthes (1967) provides a useful lens for analyzing how songs operate through signs and symbols. In initiation songs, meanings are often conveyed through metaphor, allegory, and symbolic references to animals, nature, and historical events. These symbols encode deeper cultural values, making the songs multi-layered texts that require cultural competence to decode.

Barber (1997) stresses the importance of analyzing performance context, arguing that African oral forms must be understood as events, where meaning emerges not only from content but also from how, when, and by whom the content is delivered.

Empirical studies have confirmed that music is central to initiation rituals across various African cultures. Olatunji (2010), studying Yoruba initiation rites, found that songs were crucial in instilling ethical values and gender roles in initiates. These songs often used storytelling, repetition, and poetic devices to reinforce key messages about adulthood.

In a similar vein, Nketia (1974) documents how the Akan of Ghana used music in rituals to affirm social bonds and cultural continuity. The songs performed during male initiation ceremonies served as both public proclamations and private lessons for initiates.

Enekwe (1987), in his study of Igbo masquerade performance, emphasized the didactic nature of ritual songs, which often blend history, myth, and morality. His findings showed that these performances not only entertain but also encode unspoken cultural values, particularly surrounding manhood, bravery, and silence. Eze (2015) demonstrates that traditional songs strengthen a sense of belonging and continuity, thereby functioning as instruments of indoctrination during transition rites.

More recently, Okonkwo (2019) investigated ritual songs among the Nsukka Igbo, observing how the songs employed call-and-response techniques and symbolic references to reinforce themes of duty, endurance, and collective identity. These songs were instrumental in shaping the social consciousness of the initiates.

While oral performance remains a potent tool for cultural education, scholars have raised concerns about cultural erosion due to globalization and religious influences. Oduro (2020) argues that many traditional African rites including initiation songs are becoming diluted or lost altogether, especially in urbanized or Christian-dominated regions. This erosion threatens the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge and necessitates urgent documentation and scholarly analysis.

This concern is particularly relevant for Ozuzu clan's initiation songs, which remains under-documented in scholarly literature. Existing research largely focuses on Yoruba, Akan and other Igbo subgroups, leaving Ozuzu clan's unique initiation practices. Addressing this gap is essential for both cultural preservation and the advancement of indigenous communication scholarship.

Dennis, W.W., Musungu, J. & Nandelenga, H. (2023), in their study entitled “The Construction of Manhood through the Performance of the Bukusu Circumcision Songs”. It provides a direct analogue for your work: songs used during initiation/circumcision rites to socially construct masculinity-thus offering comparative data and interpretative lenses for masculinity, initiation and social responsibility. This article analyses how performance of traditional circumcision songs among the Bukusu people constructs and reinforces cultural ideals of masculinity and social responsibility. Its focus on song, ritual and the symbolic construction of manhood offers useful parallels for your own semiotic analysis of initiation songs.

Eddison (2024), in his study “Music and Dance Traditions of Africa: Search for Indigenous Theories and Methods in Research”. It calls for context-sensitive, indigenous methodologies in researching African music and dance traditions. It addresses issues of methodology and theory in studying African oral and performative culture, an important theoretical and methodological complement to your ethnography and semiotics approach.

Addaquay (2025), in his study “Sounding Identity: A Technical Analysis of Singing Styles in the Traditional Music of Sub-Saharan Africa”. This study offers a technical and cultural analysis of singing styles in traditional music across Sub-Saharan Africa. By focusing on voice techniques, rhythm, melody, and how these interrelate with cultural meaning and identity, it provides a useful musical-analytical perspective that complements your semiotic reading of initiation songs.

Method

This study adopted a qualitative ethnographic approach. Participant observation and in-depth interviews were used. While the researchers immersed themselves within the research environment during the manhood initiation rites celebration in Ozuzu Clan, interviews were conducted with 15 persons chosen purposively. Ozuzu clan is made up of seven communities with one clan head. Two persons were selected from each of the seven communities and the clan head. The interviewees were mainly older initiates, clan heads, chiefs, opinion leaders and elite. Also, the researchers adhered strictly to ethical research standards by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, respecting cultural norms and restrictions. Participant observation protocols and interview guides served as research instruments; passed through blind peer review and were certified by a research instrumentation expert.

Data collected from the field were mainly texts: Field notes and Audio recordings - transcribed to text. They were also subjected to member-checking to ensure post-data validity. The study period was conducted in two initiation seasons from August to October 2024 and 2025 - marking the traditional market calendar (*Eke Asa*). Each text was coded thematically using **NVivo 12**, with categories aligned to the research objectives and theoretical constructs-namely, manhood, initiation, traditional songs and mythologisation.

The analysis follows a three-tiered procedure such as Semiotic Analysis (Barthes, 1931 & Peirce, 1977), for denotative level and identification of surface-level **lyrics** usage such as *Onye amuru, ya muta ibe ya*, *Ogbu na efu, aka a pu la ya* and *Onye a di tuo anya o na a chwu nkwu* etc. The manhood initiation using lyrics as signs refer to such concepts as men of ‘*Mba Asa*’, this is who we are, this is our story, and our culture is our history, are interpreted by the audiences in line with the cultural and psychological codes (Peirce, 1931). Also, the differentiation of denotation (the literal meaning) and connotation (emotional or cultural associations) offered by Roland Barthes (1977) is essential to deconstruct the mechanism of the lyrics applied in the study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents and analyses data collected through interviews, participant observations.

Table 1: Instructive Implications of Lyrics in Traditional Manhood Initiation Songs

S/No	Participants	Responses	Analysis
1	Interviewee 2	The songs are instructive about adulthood and its responsibilities in (<i>Mba Asa</i>) Ozuzu clan, in Etche.	Participants consistently expressed the view that the songs used during the <i>Mba Asa</i> manhood initiation rites are powerful tools to teach the initiates about responsibilities, good morals, and endurance. The songs also prepare the initiates to be good ambassadors and repositories of <i>Mba Asa</i> culture.
2	Interviewee 1	The songs used during the initiation process are primarily educational and moralistic.	
3	Interviewee 5	The songs tell the boys what it means to be a man — to endure pain, respect elders, and protect the community	
4	Interviewee 8	We don't just talk to them; we sing these values into them.	
5	Interviewee 10	that songs were sung at critical moments of endurance tasks and other symbolic trials	
6	Interviewee 9	The initiation song is a beautiful display of unity, culture and tradition; bringing people together in joy and celebration	

Table 2: Cultural Memory and Inter-generational Continuity in Traditional Manhood Initiation Songs

S/No	Participants	Responses	Analysis
10	Interviewee 13	Initiation songs keep our culture alive, they do so more than the rituals themselves	Participants emphasized the enduring significance that initiation songs in Ozuzu Clan carry. They insist that initiation songs are a veritable storage of their culture which has been passed down to several generations.
11	Interviewee 15	The songs are age-long, and have been passed down through oral tradition to several generations	
12	Interviewee 14	Over time, young people have grown into adults, and have learnt to chant the songs, so it is part of our lifestyle.	

Idiomatic Symbolism of Lyrics in Traditional Manhood Initiation Songs**Table 3:1 Lyric : *Onye amuru, ya muta ibe ya*"**

S/N	Participants	Participants Interpretations	Signifier
1	Interviewee 2	He who was born should give birth to another	He who is culturally groomed, should groom others for the sustenance of the Ozuzu clan's cultural heritage
2	Interviewee 4	He who is taught should teach others	
3	Interviewee 10	He who is shown the way should show others	
4.	Interviewee 12	The boys should be prepared to become men	

Table 3.2 Lyric: *Anyi bu Mba Asa*"

S/N	Participants	Participants Interpretations	Signifier
1	Interviewee 2	We are from Ozuzu clan in Etche	This is our identity; the culture is our brainchild, rooted in our history
2	Interviewee 9	This is who we are	
3	Interviewee 11	This is our story	
4.	Interviewee 8	Our culture is our history	

Table 3.3 Lyric: *Onye a di tuo anya o na a chwu nkwu*

S/N	Participants	Participants Interpretations	Signifier
1	Interviewee 2	He who refused to participate in the initiation process cannot play a role	Anyone who has not gone through the initiation process cannot participate in the <i>Mba Asa</i> culture
2	Interviewee 12	He who refused to participate is already excluded	
3	Interviewee 14	He who refused to identify with us is a stranger	
4.	Interviewee 5	He who rejects his culture cannot partake in the same culture	

Table 3.4 Lyric:Ogbu na efu, aka a pu la ya

S/N	Participants	Participants Interpretations	Signifier
1	Interviewee 2	He who intends killing the innocent must not succeed	Our culture abhors the killing of human beings or any dangerous acts that endangers human lives. This reflects a core theme of responsibility and dignity, which is central to the initiation rite
2	Interviewee 10	The blood of the innocent must never be shed	
3	Interviewee 4	We do not kill humans	
4.	Interviewee 6	The conspiracy of the evil minded can never succeed	

Table 3.5 Lyric: Ugo e'bere

S/N	Participants	Participants Interpretations	Signifier
1	Interviewee 2	The eagle has perched	The eagle here symbolizes the ideal male - strong, noble, and morally upright. This refers to the ripe moment for decision, watchfulness, wisdom, and elevated moral standing; qualities expected of adult men in the community
2	Interviewee 7	The eagle has landed	
3	Interviewee14	The eagle is here	
4.	Interviewee10	The eagle has come	

Table 3.6 Lyric: Miri e'ru ju le igwe

S/N	Participants	Participants Interpretations	Signifier
1	Interviewee 2	The rain has darkened the cloud	The rain and dark cloud represent uncertainty and moments for preparations to tackle challenges. The real time to separate the boys from men. These symbolic expressions enhance the pedagogical effectiveness of the songs.
2	Interviewee	The cloud is heavily pregnant with rains	
3	Interviewee	The cloud is piled up with rains	
4.	Interviewee	The rain is in the cloud	

Signified Meanings of Call-and Response Lyrics in Ozuzu Clan Manhood Initiation Songs**Table:4.1 Call-and-Response Pattern 1**

S/N	Participants	Lyrics	Participants Interpretations	Signifier
1	Interviewee 2	Lead: "Anyi bu Mba Asa" Chorus: "O'weh weh O'weh!"	The call and response pattern depicts affirmation of cultural dignity	Observed initiation songs followed a call-and-response structure, where a lead singer repetitively chants a line, and other participants respond in a predetermined pattern, showing affirmation.
2	Interviewee 12		It depicts unity and reinforcement of identity	
3	Interviewee 13		It shows concord and unity of purpose	
4.	Interviewee 9		It shows agreement, acceptance of culture	

Table 4.2: Call-and-Response Pattern 2

S/N	Participants	Lyrics	Participants Interpretations	Signifier
1	Interviewee 7	Lead: <i>"Ngwa nu kwe bere mu eri"</i> Chorus: <i>"E kwochie e aya kwochie!"</i>	The call and response depicts pattern and affirmation in the song	The chanted initiation songs adopts a call-and-response flow, where a lead singer repetitively chants a line, and other participants respond in a predetermined pattern, showing harmon.
2	Interviewee 11		It proves unity and collective acceptance	
3	Interviewee 15		It depicts alignment and unity of purpose	
4.	Interviewee 5		It shows renewed bond and cultural affinity	

Symbolic Clauses in Traditional Manhood Initiation of Ozuzu Clan

Table 5.1 Symbolic Clause:: Onye ishi a'ta gbara n'gwa

S/N	Participants	Participants Responses	Signifier
1	Interviewee 2	The blind is long asleep	He who is ignorant of his culture has lost touch with his root.
2	Interviewee	The blind cannot see	
3	Interviewee	The blind lives in abstraction	
4.	Interviewee	The blind lives in imagination	

Table 5.2 Symbolic Clause:: A'tu anya ma amara he

S/N	Participants	Participants Responses	Signifier
1	Interviewee 2	The manhood initiation is a school	The culture initiates boys into manhood, as ambassadors of their cultural heritage. These symbols reflect the clan's worldview on masculinity, social order, and survival which are crucial for decoding the deeper meanings of the songs.
2	Interviewee	The initiation is to prepare boys to men	
3	Interviewee	Manhood initiation is for cultural education	
4.	Interviewee	The initiation is for cultural certification	

Results and Findings

The findings indicate that the lyrical composition of these songs is deeply embedded in metaphor, ancestral reverence, moral aphorisms, and ritual symbolism. The songs consistently reference elements such as the forest, the machete, ancestral spirits, and the road. The forest symbolises the liminal space between childhood and adulthood, echoing Turner's (1969) notion of liminality in rites of passage. The machete represents bravery, readiness, and agency, while ancestral invocations provide spiritual legitimacy and continuity of lineage, consistent with Mbiti's (1999) argument that African rituals always invoke a connection between the living and the departed. The metaphor of the road functions as a symbol of life's continuous journey and the initiate's transition to maturity. As a semiotic system, these songs employ iconic signs such as imitations of animal sounds used to symbolise courage, indexical signs like distinctive drum rhythms that announce the progression of ritual stages, and symbolic signs conveyed through metaphorical language linking masculinity with duty

and honour. These findings align with Barthes' (1972) notion that cultural artefacts often operate as myths which naturalise collective social values.

The findings also reveal that the songs operate as structured communicative instruments, consistent with Hymes' (1974) *Ethnography of Communication*, which views cultural performances as speech events governed by normative rules. In the initiation context, songs transmit moral lessons by articulating culturally approved behaviours such as bravery, self-control, communal loyalty, and respect for elders. They also serve psychological functions, helping initiates manage fear and emotional uncertainty, which reinforces resilience and group solidarity. The songs further act as mechanisms for coordinating ritual stages, with specific lyrical cues and drum sequences signalling the beginning of the procession, the endurance segment, or the reintegration of initiates into the community. Through collective chanting, participants experience heightened social cohesion, reinforcing shared identity and communal belonging. This observation corresponds with Goffman's (1967) recognition that ritual communication fosters interactional bonding and strengthens community ties.

These findings demonstrate that the songs articulate a culturally defined model of masculinity grounded in strength, emotional discipline, leadership, and communal service. This aligns with Connell's (2005) argument that masculinities are culturally constructed and expressed through symbolic performances. In Ozuzu, initiation songs emphasise the responsibilities expected of a man, including protecting the community, providing for one's family, upholding lineage honour, and contributing to communal decision-making. These songs also encapsulate historical narratives and praise ancestral heroes, thus reinforcing cultural identity and continuity. Gyekye (1996) similarly argues that African oral traditions embed moral and philosophical values within performance, serving as tools of ethical education. The songs thus function semiotically to project imagery and metaphors such as the resilient tree or the productive yam, which represent unwavering strength and communal provisioning, respectively.

Moreso, findings reveal that, despite challenges posed by modernisation, Christianity, and urban migration, initiation songs continue to serve as significant cultural reservoirs. They operate as tools for intergenerational knowledge transmission, preserving indigenous historical memory, values, and worldview. Barber (2007) argues that African oral forms remain crucial archives of cultural identity, particularly in contexts where written traditions are limited. In Ozuzu, the sustained performance of these songs during cultural festivals, age-grade gatherings, and community ceremonies demonstrates their adaptive resilience. The use of indigenous Ikwerre expressions and idioms within the songs further aids linguistic preservation. Even when formal initiation practices decline, elders still employ these songs as pedagogical tools to instil discipline, moral consciousness, and social responsibility among young people. This resonates with Okpewho's (1992) assertion that oral literature functions as a medium of cultural and ethical reinforcement.

Discussions

The discussion synthesises findings through the theoretical lenses of *Ethnography of Communication* and *Semiotic Theory*. In line with Hymes' (1974) *Ethnography of Communication*, the initiation songs in Ozuzu Clan function as culturally structured speech events that reflect the community's communicative norms and social expectations. The *SPEAKING* model offers a useful framework for understanding how these songs derive meaning from ritual context. The setting of sacred groves and village squares, the participation of elders, drummers and initiates, the moral and social ends of the initiation rite, and the rhythmic sequencing of songs all work together to construct and communicate cultural values. The tonal keys of solemnity and motivation, along with the instrumentalities of drums and chants, demonstrate how oral performance shapes behaviour, identity, and moral consciousness. The genre of ritual songs itself serves as a mechanism for transmitting cultural ideologies and social responsibilities.

Semiotic Theory further enhances the understanding of these findings. Saussure's distinction between signifier and signified helps clarify how lyrical metaphors, drum patterns, and ritual chants produce meaning within Ozuzu's cultural system. Peirce's triadic model illustrates how icons, indices, and symbols function within initiation songs to guide behaviour, signify ritual progression, and communicate abstract values. Barthes' theory of myth is especially relevant, as the songs transform cultural ideals of masculinity, bravery, honour, and communal responsibility into naturalised social truths. Through this myth-making process, the songs become powerful ideological tools that reinforce cultural continuity and maintain social order.

The overall theoretical frameworks demonstrate that initiation songs are not merely performative cultural artefacts but deeply embedded communicative systems that integrate linguistic, symbolic, and ritual functions. They teach moral values, enforce cultural expectations, and unify participants within a shared worldview.

Conclusion

The study concludes that traditional initiation songs in Ozuzu Clan are multifaceted cultural expressions that encode symbolic meaning, communicate moral values, reinforce masculinity, and preserve cultural identity. Their lyrical content is rich in metaphor, ancestral wisdom, and ritual symbolism, creating a semiotic system that communicates both explicit

and implicit meanings about courage, maturity, and social responsibility. The songs serve essential communicative functions by guiding ritual action, reinforcing emotional resilience, and promoting social cohesion among initiates and community members.

Furthermore, the songs construct and reinforce culturally grounded masculinities that emphasise bravery, leadership, discipline, and service to community. They also preserve cultural values in contemporary contexts by transmitting indigenous knowledge, sustaining linguistic heritage, and fostering cultural continuity amid modern influences. The integration of Ethnography of Communication and Semiotic Theory in this study reveals the songs as complex communicative structures that preserve the cultural identity of Ozuzu people while shaping the behaviour and moral consciousness of successive generations.

The study contributes to the preservation and scholarly understanding of Ozuzu clan's oral traditions, filling a significant gap in Nigeria's ethnomusicology and cultural research. It also reinforces the importance of Ozuzu folkloric documentation, an urgent necessity given the endangered status of the peoples' oral tradition. Such documentation serves as a strategy for sustaining indigenous identity in a rapidly globalised world.

Recommendations

The study recommended that:

1. The Ozuzu manhood initiation rites should be sustained in light of the values they promote.
2. The initiation songs in Ozuzu Clan should be documented for effective preservation
3. More media exposure should be given to the initiation ceremonies to give it a global outlook
4. A museum should be established for effective preservation of artifacts used for the initiation rites.
5. A robust community-based awareness campaign should be organised periodically to sensitise the younger generation to accept the tradition.

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